

## The Fifth Commandment

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*From the "Irish Catholic"*

**T**O be understood "of man, and unjustly," is the full commentary on the Fifth Commandment by one of our best and most recent Catholic commentators. Killing is forbidden; but it is the killing of a man; and, to be a violation of the Commandment, the killing must be unjust.

There are some who shrink from killing even plants; there are many more who, like the Manichean heretics, hold it unlawful to kill brute animals; and a still larger number maintain that human life at any rate is so sacred that the very worst of criminals may not be put to death. But we need not linger on these opinions, though adherents of them are to be met with amongst ourselves. The common-sense of mankind has rejected them. Even when capital punishment is disallowed by law, it is not disallowed on the ground that God or nature forbid it, but, rather, on the ground that, as a deterrent from crime, it is ineffective.

We are concerned, then, with the taking away of human life alone, and the taking of it away without just cause. For murder is the deliberate taking away of human life without just cause. It must be deliberate: no indeliberate act can be moral or immoral, can be the subject matter of a command. And murder, as we understand it here, an infraction of God's law, must be in some sense intentional; it must be willed—directly in itself, or in the causes which lead to it—with a consciousness that it is being brought about. That there may at times be reasons which will justify the deliberate, intentional taking of human life we shall see later, but, in the absence of such reasons, there can be no doubt about the grave sinfulness of the act.

It is forbidden by this Commandment; Our Lord renews the prohibition, and St. Paul promulgates it to the Gentile world in his Epistle to the Romans. God, indeed, seems to claim, as peculiarly His own, the power of life and death. "It is thou, O Lord, that hath power of life and death," we read in the Book of Wisdom. And again in the first Book of Kings, "The Lord killeth and maketh alive. He bringeth down to hell, and bringeth back again."

And a similar special claim would appear to be implied in many other passages of Holy Scripture..

#### FORBIDDEN BY NATURE'S LAW

It is forbidden also by the law of nature, as is clear from the judgment of all mankind, at all times and in all places; and the Christian Church has, of course, ever held and preached the revealed doctrine.

But it is not so easy to assign convincing reasons for the prohibition, to show why God and nature forbid the crime of murder. It has been argued that man is a member of the civil State, which has a right to demand service from him, and that a wrong is done the State, if we render it impossible to exercise the right. The argument is inconclusive; should the State authorize murder, no injustice would be done the State by the commission of the crime; but it would still be a grievous violation of natural and Divine law. And, if there were only two survivors of the human race, the prohibition of murder would be as binding on them as it is upon ourselves.

It has been, further, maintained that the living man belongs to God, who not only is sovereign but also owner: "As I live, saith the Lord—behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine"; that injustice is done to God if His property is destroyed, without permission from Him; and that God has given no such general permission. On the other hand, God remains owner of all His gifts to man—not of life alone; yet no man is held to do injustice to God when he destroys house, or lands, or crops, or herds, or any other of the irrational things which God has given. And why may not man be the owner of his own life, even of others' lives, as he is the owner of so many other earthly possessions?

But a wrong is surely done the man whose life is unjustly taken away. He surely has a right to life, if not as against God, at least as against his fellow-man, and it must be a grave injustice to rob him of it without sufficient cause? The reasoning fails to convince; even though a man consent to his own death at another's hands, even though he inflict death upon himself, while he suffers no wrong, he cannot clear his own or another's act of the guilt of murder.

Catholic ethical writers then find it difficult to assign any

wholly satisfactory reason for the prohibition of murder by natural law; any reason which is applicable in every case, in self-murder or suicide, as in the murder of another. Holy Scripture, as we have seen, forbids it. Such, too, has been the perpetual tradition of the Church. Leo XIII, in a letter to the Bishops of Germany and Austria on the crime of duelling, sums up all Catholic teaching: "Both Divine law," he writes, "as well as that which is promulgated by the light of natural reason as that made known to us in the Divinely inspired writings, forbid strictly that any shall slay or wound a man, unless for public cause or driven by necessity in self-defense." Whatever, therefore, we may think of the philosophical arguments that are commonly adduced, it is well to note that our conviction of the essential immorality of murder is independent of them. In this, as in so many other cases, we have a far more solid foundation for our belief than any which mere human reason can supply.

#### SELF-MURDER

And this is particularly to be noted in discussing the question of self-murder or suicide. St. Augustine tells us of some heretics of his day who had held suicide not only to be lawful but to be an act of virtue, rich in merit, a kind of martyrdom. He rejects their opinion, as the Church has always rejected it; for self-murder is clearly condemned in the Commandment which forbids all murder; God's reservation to Himself of the lordship over human life and death is universal; and the law of nature, which even paganism acknowledged, is in full accord with Divine revelation. Man may, indeed, desire death. "To die is gain," St. Paul writes to the Philippians, and he adds, "I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ." And it is not only because of the joys of heaven that men may lawfully wish for death; there are many other reasons which make the desire legitimate. I may pray to be delivered by death from the danger of sinning; to be taken from among the evils, moral and physical, which afflict the world; to be spared bodily suffering which has become intolerable, or anguish of mind. It was so Elias, under the juniper tree, prayed to God "for himself that he might die, and said: it is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; I am not better than my fathers." But I may not, for such reasons,

deliberately bring about my death. I may beg of God to do what I may not do myself.

Are there not, however, cases in which a man may rightfully put himself to death? Some of the Christian martyrs, we read, forestalled the executioners, threw themselves into the flames or into the waters; and, in Old Testament times, the self-inflicted deaths of Samson and of Eleazarus met apparently with Divine approval. Such instances, it is commonly answered, may be easily explained. In some, the Saints exposed themselves to the danger only of dying; which for reasonable cause is lawful. In others they may have acted under a Divine impulse, and, therefore, with a Divine permission. And in others they may have been moved by a mistaken zeal, may have believed honestly and erroneously that they were doing a service to God, and bearing rightful witness to religious truth. There is nothing in Holy Scripture or in church history to weaken the conviction that self-murder is forbidden by God's law; forbidden by Him under pain of very grievous sin.

#### OBLIGATION OF PRESERVING LIFE

But a man may be in a sense responsible for his own death, and yet not be guilty of self-murder. A man may destroy his life, directly and of set purpose, by some positive act which has death for its object; and, if he do so of his own private authority, all ethical writers are at one in adjudging him a suicide. What, if he have been justly condemned to death, and have been ordered himself to carry out the sentence? The State may commit its execution to whom it wills; what, if it appoint the criminal? The question is not of practical importance; no civilized State makes a criminal his own executioner; and it seems to be the more common view, though there are those who maintain the opposite, that neither can the State lawfully command a malefactor to take away his own life, nor may he obey the command, should it be imposed on him. It is not, however, easy to assign any valid reason for this opinion.

That man is also a suicide who neglects the ordinary means for preserving life. Extraordinary means we may not be, we generally are not, bound to adopt. An invalid is not obliged to give up home and friends, though foreign residence might prevent an early death. I am not obliged to undergo a very painful operation, even though it be

necessary for my recovery from an otherwise fatal illness. But in such an illness I may not reject the usual remedies. I hold life in trust for God, and He forbids me to destroy it. He commands me also to have a care of it, to take all reasonable and ordinary means to safeguard it for Him. I may not be obliged to acts of heroism; but, as in the case of other trusts, I am obliged to exercise ordinary foresight and to take such measures as prudent men ordinarily take to protect from injury what has been entrusted to them.

We may, indeed, run risk of death; we must do so constantly. Life, even civilized life, would become intolerable were we bound to avoid all the dangers inseparable from living. We may even incur extraordinary risks in pursuit of objects which bear a reasonable proportion to the risks we take. A man may do battle for his country in lawful war. He may serve his fellow-men in the midst of plague and pestilence. He may adventure his life to save another life, in a fire, in a shipwreck, in the poisonous after-damp of a coal-mine explosion. But it is evident he may not run grave risk for every trivial cause; it is evident that, as the risk is greater, so must the good be greater for which the risk is deliberately invited.

#### TWO PRINCIPLES

Hence, two principles are to be always borne in mind: First, that nothing may be ever done or left undone with the direct intention of causing our own death or shortening our own lives. Second, that our obligation to preserve life is not so absolute as to require of us either the use of all measures which are, or are thought, necessary for the purpose, nor the avoidance of everything which is hurtful to health and may hasten or bring death about. The application of these principles offers little or no difficulty in the great majority of cases; and, in most, the opinion of moralists is practically unanimous. Thus, a soldier may remain at his post of duty, or join in a forlorn attack, though certain that death must be the result. The crew may sink a vessel to prevent its falling into enemy hands, though they foresee no likelihood of escape from drowning. You may give your last morsel of bread to a starving companion, though you yourself will die in consequence. You may throw yourself from the roof of a burning build-

ing, even when death seems inevitable on the ground below. To save her honor, a woman may leap from an upper story or cast herself into the sea. In a shipwreck, you may give first place in the boats to women and children; you may give to another the plank which supports you, and without which you must perish. In the late Antarctic Polar Expedition, the sick man who walked out into the darkness and the snowstorm, and was lost, that his friends might reach the coast in safety, was held to have died a hero's death. And such cases, most of them acts of splendid virtue, might be multiplied almost indefinitely.

In all of them it will be noted that death, even when most certain, is not the object directly aimed at; it is foreseen, permitted as the necessary consequence of a more than equivalent good. The soldiers' and sailors' intention is the welfare of their country. In other cases it is escape from the agony of burning, or purity of mind and body, or Christian charity, or preferential love of the weaker and more helpless, or the satisfaction of a lofty sense of honor and magnanimity of soul. Death itself is not intended as an end, not even as a means to an end. It will be remarked further that, in all these and many similar cases, when death comes, it is no longer in the power of the dying person to escape it; they have no means at hand by which life may be preserved. If they had, would they be bound to make use of them?

If they can secure the object they had in view, consistently with the use of such means, there can be no doubt that they are bound to use them. When his ship has gone down, the drowning sailor may not refuse rescue by a boat or life-belt. When danger of dishonor has passed away, the woman who sought protection in the sea must return, if possible, to shore. But, if the object had not been yet attained, if escape from death, by means however lawful and however ordinary, involves the relinquishment of that object, the dying person is under no obligation to have recourse to them.

Carthusian monks have a rule which forbids them to eat flesh meats. Suppose a Carthusian monk to have fallen ill through this abstinence, to be in danger of death, from which meat food alone can save him: is he bound in conscience to adopt it? It is certain that he may: his rule binds no longer in such extremity. It is equally certain



that he is not bound to do so. He may lawfully refuse flesh meats, though they be at hand, and die, to honor the rule and to promote the spirit of discipline and observance in his Order. He does not wish to die; he does not choose death as a measure of furthering religious fervor among his brethren; that fervor he does intend, and the means he chooses to further it is not his own death but the example of his life, of his living love of the Order, of his fidelity to its rules, of his constancy in making sacrifices for it.

#### THE HUNGER-STRIKERS

The object which the Carthusian aims at is spiritual—the welfare of his Order: the means which he adopts—abstinence from the only food which can save his life. Is it ever lawful to seek worldly objects by an extension of his self-denial, by abstinence from all food whatsoever? Suppose a considerable body of men and women, honorable and upright, united, with the approval of the great majority of their countrymen, in pursuit of a political ideal, lawful in itself, which they endeavor to attain by means hitherto considered upright and allowable. And suppose the government of the day to frame and pass legislation intended to crush their movement; suppose them to arrest some among its chief supporters, to try them, before an unqualified tribunal, for offences which have only been declared such by government itself; and then to sentence them, on what is commonly deemed insufficient evidence, to a term of imprisonment out of all proportion to the offences which have been alleged. It may be, even, that imprisonment is inflicted without any trial whatsoever. Will it be lawful to refuse all food in prison, until justice is done, until release is granted? There will be danger of death; and, if government prove obdurate, death is certain. There is, of course, no question of desiring to die, though it would be difficult to show the wrongfulness of such a wish. There is still less question of any positive act intended to bring death about. Death is not even chosen as a means, by which the objects aimed at are to be attained; though the choice, it might perhaps be argued, could be justified both in the law of nature and in the law of God.

What the hunger-striker aims at ultimately, in the case we are considering, is the welfare of his country. Directly

and immediately, he seeks to shame government into the ways of justice, to draw the attention and the sympathy of the world to the cause he has at heart, to make clear that no violence can destroy it, to encourage and embolden his fellow-citizens, to foster and hand on a spirit of fearless, self-sacrificing patriotism: all most excellent, most valuable objects, to secure which no lawful price would appear to be too great. And the price he offers? The means he adopts to secure them? His sufferings, the danger of dying, his long-drawn-out martyrdom, his constancy and heroism: all lawful in themselves, and ennobled by the purpose to which they are directed. What the dying Carthusian monk did, and did lawfully, for religion and his Order, the dying patriot does, and may do lawfully, for his country's service.

But it is self-murder? He kills himself? Only as the Carthusian did. He does not will to die. He does not act to bring death about. Death is not chosen by him as a means to the end he has in view. If it come, it is permitted by him only, and is worked out by causes which operate independent of his will. It may be that the more precious of the objects he aims at he is certain to secure. It may be that in no other way could he secure them so effectively. If it be so, and it is for prudent men with a knowledge of the circumstances to decide, a hunger-strike is as lawful in a prison as in a Carthusian cell.

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## Christianity Versus Slavery

*From the "Austral Light."*

**I**N our day, when the labor question is so actual and urgent, it is well to review the beneficent effect which the action of Christianity against slavery had upon labor and the laborer, when the laborer was the slave. This will show how from its very beginning Christianity earned the everlasting gratitude of labor for its noble, devoted and persistent efforts to root out the curse of slave labor. Thank God, the spirit of genuine Christianity is the same now as it was then, and most certainly it will ever prove itself in all possible circumstances the worker's best protector and friend.

With our ideas of freedom and citizenship it is hard—nay, almost impossible—to realize the world-wide reign of slavery in the early days of Christianity. The Roman Em-



pire then dominated the whole known world, and its power was bred and fed by slavery, ever-increasing since the days of the early kings. The insolvent debtor legally became a slave, as also many a time did the criminal. Prisoners in war were kept as slaves, and the conquerors of Asia, Africa, Scythia, and Gaul, and Britain brought home their myriad captives to be sold by public auction. Slaves were purchasable in every mart of the vast empire. The slave was his master's property, just like his horse or his dog. The Roman Law speaks of "slaves and other animals." He had no legal rights—none whatever. His master could slay, mutilate, torture, chain or imprison him as he liked, with absolute impunity. That was the accepted declaration of the law. And the cultured men of antiquity, the leaders of thought, acknowledged the righteousness of slavery. Plato and Aristotle, for instance, viewed it as natural and necessary, though at times embarrassing. The slave was the laborer of the day, when no labor question such as we now understand had any existence. Slaves were employed in the house, on the farm, in building, in manufacturing, in the mines, in art and medicine, and teaching. They, in short, monopolized all the labor of the period. The slave was the workman of the day, a workman without wages, and fed as the master could or would sustain him, a workman under the lash, at the beck of his owner or overseer. Idleness entailed the lash, and attempts to escape involved working in chains and at night sleeping in prison underground. A rich man's household was a crowd of slaves: slaves of the toilet, slaves of the bath, slaves of the entrance, slaves of the kitchen, slaves of the table, slaves for entertainment, such as singing or dancing, slaves for messengers, slaves for the library, slaves for the stables, slaves for chair-bearers, slaves for footmen, slaves for protection. And woe betide the slave, in his near contact with his master or mistress, if he offended or misbehaved. The lash followed quick and heavy. The stern, proud Roman lady sat at her toilet with a stiletto in hand, with which she stabbed the arms of her maids when they displeased her.

#### THE SLAVE'S HOPELESS LOT

Poor slave! helpless and nearly hopeless. He cringed and flattered and lied to gain good-will. By good behavior

he might sometimes gain his freedom, but the State discouraged manumission. A kind master was known occasionally to bestow freedom on a favorite, either by will or by legal process. Some masters allowed their slaves to keep gratuities wherewith eventually to purchase their freedom; but at any moment the slave could be sold or given away. He had no religion; his own, if any remained, was crushed, and he was excluded from worship in the public temples, or in private homes. Nor could he legally marry; his union, such as it was, could be broken at any time by his master, and the separated parties be obliged to a fresh union with others. The children were the master's property to be disposed of as he liked. The master might send the father to an Italian farm and the mother to an estate in Gaul or Britain, and assign the children to be brought up by others at his pleasure. But the condition of female slaves was such as can scarcely be spoken of by Christian lips. In a dissolute and licentious age, they were at the mercy of their masters, and were at times hired out for prostitution.

Can anyone realize the awful degradation such a state evolved for both slaves and master? It fed the lust, the callousness, the unspeakable cruelty of the times. The rich man's child from its cradle caught the taint which the slave was powerless to thwart or contradict. Did a pedagogue, for instance, venture to correct a pupil, the young hopeful would turn on him and taunt him with his slavery. So education became a system of flattery and pandering to the passions of the young patrician. He reckoned the life and liberty of his slaves as merely subservient to his passing humor. Hence the generation of that imperiousness and callousness that stifled the finer feelings of his nature. This dominion over flesh and blood explains his pleasure in the cruelty and blood-spilling of the amphitheater.

Who could depict the moral character of the average slave? Robbed of home and domestic affection, with no religion, no aspirations, little or no hope, ceaseless dread of punishment or sale, or consignment to harder usage, all his thoughts and feelings were crushed into one aim: to propitiate his master like a cowed animal under his owner's eye.

It is hard, too, for us to realize the extent of this social evil. Look at the number of slaves: in Italy, A. D. 50,

20,832,000 slaves and only 6,900,000 freemen. Whithersoever the Roman went he took his troops of slaves; Roman governors in their provinces, officials in their towns, merchants in their traffic, farmers on their landed estates. No wonder their number was so great throughout the world-wide empire. Moreover, the conquered nations, from Gaul to Russia, had also their own slaves under their own institutions, and this swelled the number vastly.

#### THE APOSTLES' TASK

And into this seething mass of moral corruption came the Apostles to teach all nations to observe whatever their Blessed Lord had commanded. What a task! To enlighten by faith the human mind and soul darkened by centuries of idolatry and passion was a stupendous undertaking; but to cope with the corruption of almost universal slavery appeared utterly beyond their strength. Had the Apostles commanded these millions of slaves to shake off their fetters and arise freemen, the result would have been pandemonium. By such beings, unfit for self-control, with their long pent-up passions unloosed, all social bonds would have been swept away in massacre and pillage, ending in confusion, anarchy, and eventual famine. For the whole fabric of society was held together by slavery. Slavery was ingrained in the laws, customs, habits, property, pleasure, interests, luxury of the people. The mere suggestion by the innovator of its sudden abolition would have roused all classes. It had to be a work of years. The reform had to come from within; current ideas, erroneous notions had to be corrected. The Apostles had to teach that slaves were neither an inferior race nor a degraded nature, but could participate equally in the spiritual graces offered by Christ.

This St. Paul, for instance, emphatically declared in his epistle to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." To the Corinthians he says: "For in one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free." To the Colossians: "Where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all in all." For fear that such an explicit declaration of equality should breed rebellion

he enjoined a noble obedience, obedience to God, who created both slave and master. "You slaves," he writes to the Ephesians, "obey those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your hearts, as to Jesus Christ Himself. Not serving the eye, as it were pleasing men, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will, serving as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good things any man shall do, the same shall he receive from the Lord, whether he be bond or free." And then, addressing the masters: "And you, masters, do the same things to them, forbearing threatenings, knowing that the Lord both of them and you is in Heaven, and there is no respect of persons with Him." There were higher and reserved matters in which the slaves need not obey; both slave and master had to obey a higher Master.

#### THE LEAVEN SPREADS

This teaching, at first entirely at variance with the general convictions, spread by degrees, began to leaven society and impart to it a new life. To the Christian slave what a revelation and resurrection! No longer a beast of burden, a mere chattel, he had a soul equal in price to that of his master; he had, perhaps, a future surpassing that of his master; he had hope, life, buoyancy. Toil borne patiently for a few years, and then eternal rest and freedom. The Christian master, imbued with Christian faith and principles, understood that caprice must yield to reason: he saw his slave as bought with the blood of Christ, destined for Heaven, his brother to be loved, not treated with rigor and harshness and cruelty. The increase of Christians brought the pagans into familiarity with their teachings and principles. First amazement seized them, then admiration, finally imitation; and so by degrees the whole mass of society was changed, transfigured, softened, and sanctified; and slavery was doomed. Practise also confirmed Christian preaching, because it treated the slave, not as a man only, but as a brother. Read St. Paul's inspired Epistle to Philemon. What a charter of human liberty! What a blow to slavery! He pleads for a fugitive slave called Onesimus, whom he sends back to his master, Philemon. "I beseech thee for my son, Onesimus. Receive him as my

own bowels, not now as a slave, but as a most dear brother. If he hath wronged thee in anything, or is in thy debt, put that to my account." The hitherto despised slave was made a member of the Church with the same ceremonies as his master; he had the same Sacraments; the same grace; the same privileges. His marriage was a true marriage in God's sight, as sacred as that of a freeman. In company with his master he assisted at the Sacred Mysteries; nay, his master, if only yet a catechumen, withdrew while the slave remained. They knelt together before the Holy of Holies, they gave each other the kiss of peace before Communion, and all, bond and free, received the body of the same Blessed Lord. When a slave shed his blood for the Faith the Church venerated him as a martyr, and the Christians celebrated the Sacred Mysteries over his tomb. Again, slaves were prompted to the priesthood; nay, on some occasions became bishops; and in 221 a fugitive slave was raised to the Chair of Peter, made Vicar of Christ, and ruled the Church of God.

Realize if you can the effect of such public treatment, such open recognition of equality, such reception into brotherhood. The slave's life, no longer a blank, no longer a degradation. He deemed himself the son of his Father, God, the disciple of his higher Master, Christ. "There is neither bond nor free, for all are one in Jesus Christ." Thus Christianity prepared the slave for freedom, taught him self-control, raised his ideals, made him fit to take his place among freemen. Of course, this was a work of time. The conversion of every slave lightened his toil by infusing spirit into his soul; the conversion of every freeman softened the lot of every slave of whom he was the master.

#### THE CHURCH FREES THE SLAVE

Having thus prepared the way, Christianity undertook the emancipation of the down-trodden race. It began by the declaration that the manumission of a slave was a good work, whereas the pagan State still discouraged it. As early as the first century Pope Clement speaks of persons going into slavery to redeem others; and St. Ignatius, the martyr, exhorts slaves "to be patient and not desire to be set free at the expense of the community." Consider also the significance of the collections among Christians to ob-

tain freedom for slaves. The Church exhorted her converts not only to treat their slaves well, but to give them freedom; although, of course, with prudence, lest the condition of unprotected freemen became precarious. At last, after 250 years of expansion, education and preparation of the minds of the people, the Church's opportunity came, at the conversion of Constantine. She emerged from the Catacombs to take part in the government of the world. She did not brand slavery as a crime, or inhuman, for it still entered into the structure of the law, civil customs, and family life. At her suggestion, the Christian Emperors mitigated the harsh dominion of slave owners, abolished their power of life and death, gave to the slave redress at law, and legalized his marriage. The Church enhanced the dignity of the manumission by requiring that it should take place in the church before the altar. She assumed the protection of men thus freed, and shielded them from further molestation. Council after council, in various nations, made provisions in favor of slaves. These councils declared the churches to be places of refuge for ill-treated slaves, obtaining thereby a fair examination of their grievances. The slave who became a monk or a cleric obtained thereby his freedom. The Church could not pass her slaves to other masters, but only to freedom, and Canon Law regulated the treatment of such slaves. Jews were forbidden to buy Christian slaves, and the use of them was restricted; finally, Jews were forbidden to hold them. The Church strongly urged individuals to free their slaves as a work of piety for the good of their souls. Many by will gave them freedom, or transmitted them to the Church as a stepping-stone to liberty. Thus the Consul Gallicanus freed in one day 5,000 slaves, and St. Melania 8,000. Accordingly the number of slaves in the Empire grew yearly less and less, until in 200 years after Constantine the Church had nearly eradicated the social evil.

#### THE WORK OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS

After the downfall of the Roman Empire and the establishment of fresh nations on its ruins, the Church gradually brought about the abolition of slavery by a process similar to that employed under the Empire. Mahometanism spread slavery again. It captured Christians by war, piracy or kidnapping, and subjected them to a slave's lot,



and a slave's work. It gloried in enslaving the dogs of Christians, as it called them. Again, the Church sided with the slave, and left nothing undone to secure his freedom. She persuaded princes and nobles to contribute large sums of money for the liberation of captives. She lavished her own funds in the same direction, even melting Church plate for so noble a work of charity. Then arose two Religious Orders, the exclusive foundation of the Church—the Trinitarians and the Order of Mercy. These religious, in making the usual vows, devoted their lives to the redemption of the captive slaves, adding a fourth vow to take the place of the slave in default of other means of ransom. With a story to melt all hearts they begged from door to door, and with funds thus gathered they sent brethren among the infidels to purchase Christian slaves and bring them back rejoicing. In this heroic work the Trinitarians had 250 houses engaged, and their records declare that from 1198 to 1787 they ransomed 900,000 Christian slaves; and the Order of Mercy from 1218 to 1632 ransomed 490,706. Nor was their fourth vow a vain profession, for hundreds took the place of the captives, did a slave's work, and died a slave's death. Numbers, too, were tortured and martyred to free the slaves.

It is an historical fact that wherever slavery raised its hideous head there was the Church to oppose, mitigate, or destroy it. When Spain and Portugal made large conquests in South America, Pope and Bishops exerted themselves to the utmost to save the conquered natives from slavery; and through the influence of the Church the rulers of Spanish dominions issued edicts which to a certain extent restricted the greed of the invaders. The Vicars of Christ have again and again proclaimed to the world the iniquity of slavery; among them Pius II in 1432, Paul III in 1537, Urban VIII in 1639, Benedict XIV in 1741, Gregory XVI in 1830. And in recent times who has not admired the noble letter of Leo XIII to the Bishops of Brazil in 1888, and the assistance granted to Cardinal Lavigerie in dealing with the African slave trade? No fair mind can help contrasting this early, long, and persistent action of the Church against slavery with the comparatively recent awakening of the conscience of the Christian sects to the iniquity of the traffic in human flesh and blood.

Thus the Church has struggled from the beginning for

the welfare of the slave. The abolition of slavery in the Roman Empire was a stupendous work, and entirely her own. No other agency could cope with the monstrous evil. No help did she get from pagan emperors, no encouragement from heathen philosophers. Had she not accomplished the change before the irruption of the barbarians, can anyone adequately conceive the frightful catastrophe the setting loose millions of slaves would have produced? Some writers vainly strive to explain the abolition of slavery by a process of evolution and the general softening of the times; true, but who brought about that evolution and softening but the preaching, the doctrine, and the example of Christianity? Remember that the laborer then was the slave. His condition had reached its lowest ebb; no home, no family could he call his own, no wages. The lash, the prison, or death at his master's caprice was his lamentable lot. Fed as his master pleased, he had no option in either kind or amount of work; no redress, no appeal; hired or sold, or exiled from one country to another; no political rights, no advocate, no protector. Christianity, and it alone, came to his rescue. It gave him a wife and children, with their work and wages; it gave him security of retaining the fruits of his labor; it gave him a prospect of happiness and content in this life, and the hope of a blissful eternity in the other.

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### Dante and St. Thomas.

CARDINAL MERCIER

*Translated for the "Ave Maria" by Roy Temple House*

CHRISTIAN theology has two technical terms to designate the two stages of our life, the period of time and that of eternity. In the first stage, man is a traveler, *viator*, on his way toward an objective point, toward a universal good to be attained. About us things and events pass, the course of nature, the ebb and flow of history. At the end of his journey, at the moment when he takes possession of the object of his terrestrial pilgrimage, the traveler changes his name. Henceforth he is called conqueror, possessor, *comprehensor*.

Humankind observes the passage of ephemeral phenomena and historic successions; men of science scru-

tinize their laws; the philosophers, whom history has called sometimes sages, sometimes lovers of wisdom, strive to bind them into synthetic unity, to explain their origins, their deep causes, their supreme finality.

This is the problem which rises before the universal conscience. There are not two problems; there is only one. Man has not two tasks to accomplish; he has but one—to pass wisely from time to eternity. The Supreme Master has declared: "Only one thing is necessary."

Dante Alighieri, great genius and noble character, perceived the amplitude and felt the keenness of this decisive problem; all the energies of his great soul were directed toward its solution. What is nature? What is humanity? What am I to myself? My soul longs to free itself from the baser instincts which paralyze it, to escape from the prison where it stifles. Can it do this? How? I seem to hear the fervid Florentine repeating the cry of St. Paul: "The evil which I would not, that I do; and the good that I would I do not. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Dante was one of the most active minds of his age. Ancient mythologies and philosophies, sciences of a terrestrial nature and of the heavenly bodies, the grandeur and decadence of empires and cities, the cult of the true and the beautiful, paganism and Christianity—nothing had escaped him, nothing found him indifferent. The day when he attacks the problem of life, he will pass the borders of his personal conscience, the frontiers of his city and his nation; he will become the interpreter of humanity. He is a philosopher, he is a believer; he will speak at once the language of reason, of science, and the language of the Scriptures, of Catholic theology.

From the exile into which he had been sent by his city, "mother without love," he looked on bitterly at the shock of political passions, at their cruel sterility. His anxious thinking sought everywhere the issues through which he might find light and radiate peace. He prepared to dominate the noise of combats and the violence of political quarrels, to submit the ages to the infallible verdict of eternal morality.

## TWO MASTERPIECES OF WISDOM

At the end of the thirteenth century two great minds were facing the problem of life. One had already found its solution, and, with the calmness of a soul sure of itself, he was offering it to his contemporaries. Too humble to cherish a suspicion of the fact, he was offering it to the meditation of all the generations to come. This contemplative genius was named Thomas Aquinas.

The other, Dante Alighieri, in whose heart surged at the same time the passions of an ardent temperament and the lava of the conflicts and revolutions of a war-like people, sought for his soul and the souls of his brethren a way of escape from violence into peace, from moral disorder into virtue. A sincere disciple of Christ, of the Gospel and of the Church, he had been won by the philosophy and the theology of the monk of St. Sabinus, had fed upon them, had made them his own, and coveted the honor of displaying them before the wondering gaze of contemporaries. The "Summa" of the Angelic Doctor and the "Divine Comedy" of Dante are, I believe we can say without fear of a well-founded objection, the two masterpieces of theology and art.

In the Vatican fresco, the "Discussion on the Holy Sacrament," where Raphael has pictured heaven and earth united by Christ, triumphant in glory, adored in the Eucharist, St. Thomas Aquinas is seated with St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and Blessed Scotus, beside the great Doctors of the Church, Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine; he bears on his breast his symbol, the sun; he teaches, he enlightens, he vivifies; Dante is the neighbor of Savonarola; they teach also, but in a sphere where our poor humanity struggles in the laborious bringing forth of fraternity and peace. St. Thomas gazes upon the human drama from his place above in the skies. Dante looks on it with an eye in which are concentrated the humiliations and sufferings of sick, wounded, anxious hearts.

What is the "Summa" of Thomas Aquinas? The synthesized and reasoned response of Revelation to the problem of human destiny. The work comprises three parts. In the first part God bursts on our sight

—our God, He who explains to us whence we come, what we are, whither we go, with the created world which surrounds us, and whose constant praises of the Divine Majesty we are called upon to interpret. St. Thomas tells us what this God is; he explains His intimate life in the unity of His nature and the trinity of His personal substances; he explains the created work cast by Him into space and time.

At the head of this sensible world, whose site is our earth, we find man, a free agent, responsible for the conduct of his life. How should man direct his life? Can he do so, and under what conditions? This is the theme of the second part of the "Summa," a treatise on morals—general morals in the first place, special morals afterward.

The moral act directed toward the supreme God; the elements which constitute morality; the fundamental distinction between good and evil; the fixing of the will in the good by virtue and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in evil by vice; the notion of sin, and its genesis; the moral law in its multiple aspects; Divine grace, which lifts virtue to the height of holiness: this is the object of the first section of the second part. The detailed and specifically applied study of the virtues and vices which form or deform the perfect man, the saint, is pursued in the second section, which thus treats of applied morals.

In the first part, then, God, the sovereign Good, offers Himself to us, invites us to know Him and to love Him. In the second part, man goes freely to meet God, gives himself to Him; the union of the soul with God is accomplished, holiness is consummated. Who has the power to produce this miracle? The Christ, the Eternal Word made man, and the Redeemer of humanity.

The human soul is sinful; to original sin it has added the stains of its personal faults or crimes; its purification is the work of grace; grace is the result of the Sacraments, the Sacraments being the fruit of Atonement. Christ, the Sacraments, grace, artisans of the purification and the sanctification of souls and of their triumphal entry into glory, are the themes of the third and last part of the "Summa" of St. Thomas Aquinas.

## THE DIVINE COMEDY

The same theme forms the subject, the inspiring and directing idea, of the "Divine Comedy." Dante calls St. Thomas "his master and his guide." The monk, in his cell, considers man, sin, conversion and accomplished sanctification. The spirited Florentine, wandering through the cities and fields of Italy, studies men of flesh and blood, observes their failings and their vices, sounds the depths and tastes the joy of repentance, sings the happiness of victory. The doctor speaks the language of soul to soul, banishes images, silences sentiment, arranges and relates abstract conceptions. The poet sees the idea only through the image, gives it out only in symbols; is moved, moves others, mounts and descends the whole gamut of passion and the rhythm of sentiment. In its details and in its entirety, his work is a continual allegory. . . .

The work of Thomas Aquinas is a treatise; that of Dante is an epic. The two supplement each other. The first has opened the way for the second; the second makes the other live and vibrate. One does not know which to admire more, the doctor or the singer. Happy the people, blessed the civilization which has produced these two geniuses! For the two are sons of Christianity and of the Catholic Church. Doubtless they belong to all humanity, since the problem they attack is the problem of human destiny; but they belong first of all to the Church, as our venerated and beloved Pontiff, Benedict XV, proclaims with a justifiable pride; because the solution which they offer to our meditation and our enthusiasm is the solution which Christ brought to the world, and which our mother the Church bids us believe, embrace, realize.

"Come back to life," says the poet, "and triumph."  
*"Risurgi i vinci.* Come back from Hell, traverse Purgatory, enter the glories of Paradise. Hell, Purgatory and Paradise are not, in the profound thought of the poet, the three states—that of irreparable death, of temporary expiation, of final beatitude—which our future life will reveal to us. They are partially that, no doubt, in their allegorical significance; but the allegory is designed to aid us to penetrate more deeply, in thought, into the moral hell of a vicious heart, a heart ensnared by sensuality, by pride, by avarice, and incapable of scaling again, by its own unaided effort, the slope down which nature has fallen. . . .